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A-ONE #1401   01/06/12

~ Happy New Year to All! ~ People Are Talking!   ~ Navigating With Eyes!
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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
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Happy New Year!! I hope that your New Year's celebration was an enjoyable
one! We spent a very quiet evening at home, as is the usual "custom"
these days. And for a change, I didn't even stay up to watch "the ball"
fall in Times Square.

U.S. politics is rapidly gaining speed now that the Iowa Caucus has
cast its vote. It's still a long way until November, and the ride looks
to be a long and tenuous one! I have a feeling that the GOP run for the
White House will take on similar path as that of Obama's run 4 years ago.
With him on the opposite side of the campaign path! I think that it's
going to take a miracle - or a really poor GOP candidate - for Obama to
re-gain the Oval Office for a second term. But, stranger things have
occurred in politics!

We've made it through the new year without any snow on the ground,
something that is fairly rare for this part of the country. But, you
won't seem any complaints from me! As far as I'm concerned, I'm more
than happy to leave my snowblower sitting in the garage gathering dust!

So, as we revel in the new year, let's move forward with a new issue
to help us do so.

Until next time...

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                        Hatari 1.6.0 Released

Just in time to celebrate the new year 2012, the latest version of Hatari
has been released; you can get it on http://hatari.tuxfamily.org/ or
directly in http://download.tuxfamily.org/hatari/

Sources are of course available, as well as prebuilt binaries for Windows
(if someone can supply an OS X version, it will be added too).

Please note that Hatari is no longer hosted on berlios.de, but on
tuxfamily.org.

Small changelog :

- More accurate FDC emulation (correct status bits and command timings, DMA transfer by blocks of 16 bytes, floppy change detection). This should fix a lot of non working games, as well as a few demos.
- More accurate microwire clock emulation
- SCSI class 1 (ICD) command support for drives > 1 GB
- Improve shifter (add another method to do 4 pixel hardware scrolling, better emulation for 0 byte blank line)
- Some fixes to the IKBD emulation
- Better filters and model for sound emulation
- Correct VBL timings in TT monochrome (double clicking works now)
- More cycle accurate Falcon DSP <-> CPU emulation. All the demos that needed 32Mhz CPU with the old CPU core in Hatari v1.5, work now at correct 16Mhz with the WinUAE CPU core
- 030 MMU emulation with the WinUAE CPU core
- Debugger improvements : "history" command to list instructions executed before entering debugger.
- Fixed behavior of the Caps Lock key

Fixed Demos :
Overscan Demos and Shforstv.exe by Paulo Simoes (black line at top),
ACF - Just Bugging (FDC), Delirious Demo IV (FDC, shifter),
Overdrive Demos - Snirkel Screen (IKBD), Oxygene - Stniccc2000 (FDC),
Cream - Madness (FDC)

Fixed Games :
Superior 65 - Super Monaco GP, DBug 24 - Knightmare, Pompey Pirates
27 - X-Out, Fuzion 32 - Pang, Fuzion 108 - The Simpson, Fuzion 40 -
Super Grand Prix, Fuzion 46 - Warlock, Fuzion 51 - Navy Seals, Fuzion
61 - Gods, Fuzion 78 - Carmen Sandiego, Fuzion 82 - Flight Of The
Intruder, Fuzion 83 - RBI Baseball 2, Fuzion 102 - Exile, PP46 -
Yolanda, Medway Boys 15 - Murders In Venice, Medway Boys 83 - Yogi
Bear, BBC 2 - Platoon, BBC 39 - The Deep, Superior 71 - The Running
Man, Adrenaline 24 - Demon Blue, Superior 93 - Alien Storm

Fixed Misc Programs :
Procopy 1.50, Terminators Copy 1.68, maxYMizer (caps lock key)

For best results in STF mode, please use TOS 1.04 (TOS 1.02 is sometimes causing crashes). For STE, use TOS 1.62 or 2.06.

See release-notes.txt for the full changelog.

Thanks to all the people who worked on this version by submitting code, ideas and bug reports !

Nicolas

Link: http://hatari.tuxfamily.org/

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Atari's Threat Rattles Apple!
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 Atari's Legal Threats Prompt Apple To Pull Some Games from iOS App Store

Game maker Atari has reportedly set its sights on applications in Apple's
iOS App Store that it believes are illegal knock-offs of its own classic
titles.

Legal pressure from Atari has caused some titles to be removed by Apple
from the App Store, including "Vector Tanks" by Black Powder Media,
gamesindustry.biz reported on Tuesday (via The Loop). The developer issued
a statement saying that anything with a "passing resemblance to an Atari
classic has been issued a copyright infringement claim."

The developer asserts that Atari has a "special relationship" with Apple,
which has led to applications being pulled without a chance for rebuttal
or further evaluation. Black Power Media's "Vector Tanks" is a wireframe
3D game that resembles Atari's "Battlezone."

The developer even claims they previously attempted to contact Atari to
license their intellectual property for "Vector Tanks," but they could not
be reached. He said the company seems "to have fallen off the planet."

An official Kickstarter page that was originally seeking funding to create
a "Vector Tanks 3" states that Atari's legal pressure has affected
"hundreds of apps" available for the iPhone and iPad. However, there's no
indication how many other applications have been affected or pulled from
the App Store because of Atari's approach.

The third installment of the tank game will now be redesigned with faster
vehicles and air-based attackers to avoid Atari's claims of intellectual
property infringement, and will have the name "The Visceral Adventures of
Vic Vector."

"Spurred by the competition and their heavy tactics, we're making our game
that much better, and Vic Vector's universe that much sleeker and cooler,"
the developer said.

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SOPA Opponents May Go Nuclear and Other 2012 Predictions

The Internet's most popular destinations, including eBay, Google, Facebook, and Twitter, seem to view Hollywood-backed copyright legislation as an existential threat.

It was Google co-founder Sergey Brin who warned that the Stop Online Piracy Act and the Protect IP Act "would put us on a par with the most oppressive nations in the world." Craigslist founder Craig Newmark, Twitter co-founders Jack Dorsey and Biz Stone, and LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman argue that the bills give the Feds unacceptable "power to censor the Web."

But these companies have yet to roll out the heavy artillery.

When the home pages of Google.com, Amazon.com, Facebook.com, and their Internet allies simultaneously turn black with anti-censorship warnings that ask users to contact politicians about a vote in the U.S. Congress the next day on SOPA, you'll know they're finally serious.

True, it would be the political equivalent of a nuclear option - possibly drawing retributions from the influential politicos backing SOPA and Protect IP - but one that could nevertheless be launched in 2012.

"There have been some serious discussions about that," says Markham Erickson, who heads the NetCoalition trade association that counts Google, Amazon.com, eBay, and Yahoo as members. "It has never happened before."

Web firms may be outspent tenfold on lobbyists, but they enjoy one tremendous advantage over the SOPA-backing Hollywood studios and record labels: direct relationships with users.

How many Americans feel a personal connection with an amalgamation named Viacom - compared with voters who have found places to live on Craigslist and jobs (or spouses) on Facebook and Twitter? How would, say, Sony Music Entertainment, one of the Recording Industry Association of America's board members, cheaply and easily reach out to hundreds of millions of people?

Protect IP and SOPA, of course, represent the latest effort from the Motion Picture Association of America, the RIAA, and their allies to counter what they view as rampant piracy on the Internet, especially offshore sites such as ThePirateBay.org. It would allow the Justice Department to obtain an order to be served on search engines, Internet providers, and other companies forcing them to make a suspected piratical Web site effectively vanish, a kind of Internet death penalty.

There are early signs that the nuclear option is being contemplated. Wikimedia (as in Wikipedia) called SOPA an "Internet Blacklist Bill." Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales has proposed an article page blackout as a way to put "maximum pressure on the U.S. government" in response to SOPA.

The Tumblr microblogging site generated 87,834 calls to Congress over SOPA. Over at GoDaddyBoycott.org, a move-your-domain-name protest is scheduled to begin today over the registrar's previous - and still not repudiated - enthusiasm for SOPA. Popular image hosting site Imgur said yesterday it would join the exodus too.

Technically speaking, it wouldn't be difficult to pull off. Web companies already target advertisements based on city or ZIP code.

And it would be effective. A note popping up on the screens of people living in the mostly rural Texas district of SOPA author Lamar Smith, Hollywood's favorite Republican, asking them to call or write and voice their displeasure, would be noticed. If Tumblr could generate nearly 90,000 calls on its own, think of what companies with hundreds of millions of users could do.

If these Web companies believe what their executives say (PDF) about SOPA and Protect IP, they'll let their users know what their elected representatives are contemplating. A Senate floor debate scheduled for January 24, 2012 would be an obvious starting point.

"The reason it hasn't happened is because of the sensitivity," says Erickson, "even when it's a policy issue that benefits their users." He adds: It may happen."

Or it may not. It would change politics if it did.

Censorship: Belarus Makes Certain Web Behaviors Illegal

A new law in Belarus will restrict access to foreign websites, and will require Internet cafes and clubs to report users who visit forbidden pages.

The Eastern European country's law (Improvements to the Usage of the National Segment of the Internet, law number 317-3), goes into effect Friday - censorship making it illegal to conduct ecommerce with Belarusian citizens through sites outside the country's .by domain name.

All companies and individuals registered as entrepreneurs in Belarus must use the national portal for conducting business, providing services and exchanging email, explains the Library of Congress in an online post. That means citizens are restricted from buying from Amazon or the Apple Store, and selling on eBay, among many other sites.

The law's restrictions don't stop without banning "extremist" and "pornographic" sites.

Citizens caught breaking the new law - as well as those providing Internet connection to people breaking the law - can be punished with fines of up to 1 million Belarus rubles (about $125) by the tax authorities, police and secret police.

Both the U.S. and the UK have condemned President Alexander Lukashenko's repression of his political opponents, restricted travel to the country, and frozen assets channeled to the government, the BBC reports.

Do you think Belarus is helping its economy by keeping ecommerce on its own domain sites or is it hurting itself by restricting foreign business?

How The US Pressured Spain To Adopt Unpopular Web Blocking Law

Though a deeply divided Congress is currently considering Internet website censorship legislation, the US has no such official policy - not even for child porn, which is voluntarily blocked by some ISPs. Nor does the US have a government-backed "three strikes" or "graduated response" system of escalating warnings to particular users accused of downloading music and movies from file-sharing networks.

Yet here was the ultimatum that the US Embassy in Madrid gave the Spanish government in February 2008: adopt such measures or we will punish you. Thanks to WikiLeaks, we have the text of the diplomatic cable announcing the pressure tactics.

We propose to tell the new government that Spain will appear on the Watch List if it does not do three things by October 2008. First, issue a [Government of Spain] announcement stating that Internet piracy is illegal, and that the copyright levy system does not compensate creators for copyrighted material acquired through peer-to-peer file sharing. Second, amend the 2006 'circular' that is widely interpreted in Spain as saying that peer-to-peer file sharing is legal. Third, announce that the GoS [Government of Spain] will adopt measures along the lines of the French and/or UK proposals aimed at curbing Internet piracy by the summer of 2009.

The Watch List referenced is the US Trade Representative's "Special 301" list, updated annually. Spain was duly put on the list in 2008 after failing to take such measures. ("The United States is concerned by the Spanish government s inadequate efforts to address the growing problem of Internet piracy, described by U.S. copyright industries as one of the worst in Europe," said the 2008 report.) Spanish copyright holders applauded the move; indeed, the cables show that they repeatedly asked US officials to make it.

Spain certainly has a huge community of pirates and there are many that doesn't expect to pay for downloaded content (some of this is due to rampant consumer confusion over a levy paid on blank media, which many believe covers such activity). Even the Spanish Secretary of State conceded in 2008 that "Spanish internet users were very heavy consumers of illicit content." But how to address the issue? Perhaps by putting someone from the film industry in charge of Internet piracy policy?
Meet the Minister

Spain got a new Culture Minister in 2009 - `ngeles GonzÆlez-Sinde Reig, who was formerly the head of the Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias CinematogrÆficas de Espaæa (Spanish Academy of Cinematographic Arts & Sciences). Sinde quickly promoted the "Sinde Law," a plan to give a government committee the power to blacklist Internet sites trafficking in copyrighted files. Helpfully, the content industries already had a list of 200 sites drawn up for banning.

Sinde recognized the obvious conflict between her new position and her old one for the film industry; as the US embassy put it in a cable, "she also acknowledged the importance of fighting any perception that she was only interested in piracy for personal reasons, and she has taken a relatively low public profile on the issue in her first months." Privately, however, "she is actively engaged in the fight against piracy."

Though Sinde repeatedly stressed that she had no intention of going after individual file-swappers, private communications made clear that this was only a starting position. In December 2009, the embassy noted the familiar

pattern of IP litigation: always demand more, but do so in stages.

"While many content providers wish the government would go further, they also believe these measures probably represent the most that can be achieved at this point and that accepting them will enhance rights-holders' ability to press the government for more stringent measures in the future," said the cable.

In 2010, Sinde told the US ambassador not to worry about the legislation being watered down. "The Minister replied that the Government has committed to trying this approach first, and if it doesn't prove effective, they will come back with additional and perhaps stronger measures," said a cable. The thumbscrews can always be tightened further.

The US arranged to aid Sinde, and it lobbied hard for her measure, even carrying her position to other Spanish opposition parties to request their support. The goal wasn't simply to affect Spanish law; Sinde's "receptivity also gives us an opportunity during Spain's EU presidency to influence developments beyond Spain," one cable noted.

Resistance from locals was fierce. The US embassy, which enthusiastically supported the Sinde law, noted that "serious challenges" lay ahead, that the law was opposed by Internet groups and lawyers, and that "the outcome is uncertain."

Still, the government didn't think much of the opposition. Carlos Guervos, Deputy Director for Intellectual Property at the Ministry of Culture, told the US ambassador that "the dogs bark but the caravan moves on" and that the law would be passed.

The dogs put up a good fight, though. As the BBC noted, "Last year hacktivist group Anonymous organised a protest at the Goya Awards - Spain's equivalent of the Oscars - which saw several hundred people in Guy Fawkes masks booing the minister of culture while applauding Alex de la Iglesia, then-president of the Spanish Film Academy. The movie director had previously voiced opposition to the Sinde law on Twitter and later resigned over the issue."

Then in late 2010, opposition parties managed to halt the bill in parliament. On December 21, the Electronic Frontier Foundation declared victory and said that a committee had "just stripped the website shut-down provision from the Sustainable Economy Bill" - in part due to the revelations about US pressure.

But the government found a way to bypass the barking mutts, leaving the law for the incoming administration to handle after November 2011. (The law was so unpopular that the former administration elected not approve it after huge levels of animosity surfaced on social networking sites.) The new government did so quickly, passing a modified version of the Sinde law - judges will now have to issue the actual blacklist order, for instance.

Why the sudden movement? US pressure again played a role. As El Paí s reported yesterday, the US ambassador sent a letter to Spanish government officials on December 12, 2011, in which Spain was blasted for not getting the job done. The US could move to put Spain on its Section 301 "priority" watch list, a more severe designation which could carry the threat of trade penalties.

Within weeks, the new Spanish government came through.

Whatever you think of the resulting legislation, the process was grotesque: the Spanish film industry got one of its officials into power, then promoted a tough new law backed by the threats (and even active lobbying) of the US government - though the US didn't take the same measures itself.

As for the US position, it too was informed by self-interested Hollywood sources. "[US] Ambassador Solomont said he had heard a great deal about Spain's Internet piracy problem, from MPAA [Motion Picture Association of America] CEO [Dan] Glickman and others," said a February 2010 diplomatic cable, "and asked where things stand with the government's legislative proposal on shutting down or blocking pirate websites."

"We cast our minds back to the time of censorship, of the dictator."

Hollywood exerts such pressure around the world, and the US State Department is generally willing to support a major American export industry like the movie business. The MPAA was behind a high-profile Australian legal battle in which it attempted to force a major Internet provider to cut off subscribers' access without a judicial order. At Hollwyood's behest, the US government has pushed hard in Canada for stricter theater camcording laws and tougher IP enforcement; the US threatened Canada with going on the "Priority" Special 301 Watch List in 2008 after Canada proved slow to act. WikiLeaks cables even showed that the US Embassy in New Zealand was drafting plans for the US taxpayer to spend half a million New Zealand dollars to bankroll a private intellectual property enforcement unit run by major rightsholders in the region.

That's how the legislative paella gets made, but the paella-eaters don't have to like it. Víctor Domingo Prieto, head of Spain's Asociación de Internautas (Association of Internet Users), said this week in an over-the-top statement that the Sinde Law makes Internet users "cast our minds back to the time of censorship, of the dictator."

For its part, a Spanish government spokesperson said that "Spain joins the international standard in the fight against piracy" with the passage of the new law.

The "borderless Internet"? Despite the hopes and fears of the 1990s, the Internet has turned out to be quite "borderable" after all. The Sinde Law simply tosses one more shovel-full of dirt on the idea's coffin. Digital borders, like borders everywhere, will always leak, but sufficiently determined governments can and will erect them on the 'Net. Especially with the US government pushing hard to erect them.

Only in Sweden Would File-Sharing Become an Official Religion

It took two years and two failed attempts for members of the Missionary Church of Kopimism to earn the official designation as a state-recognized religion in Sweden, but they finally did it. Run by a group of people who consider copying to be sacred - the Kopimi version of the Christian cross or the Muslim crescent is CTRL-C and CNTL-V - the now official Swedish religion has grown its membership from 1,000 to 3,000 in the last six months, and the details of the inner workings sound more activist than religous. Torrent Freak's prolific semi-anonymous blogger Ernesto talked to the church's founder on Wednesday after the Kopimi earned the final

approval from Swedish authorities. I think that more people will have the courage to step out as Kopimists. Maybe not in the public, but at least to their close ones," Isak Gerson, a young philosophy student whom Ernesto describes as a "religious file-sharer." Gerson added, "There s still a legal stigma around copying for many. A lot of people still worry about going to jail when copying and remixing. I hope in the name of Kopimi that this will change." Only in Sweden, we think. This is the same country that the torrent site founded the international Pirate Party movement just five years ago, not long after the formation of the popular torrent site The Pirate Bay. And yes, they mean the file-sharing kind of pirate.

Apple Loses Bid to Keep Software Information Under Seal in Psystar Case

Apple Inc. failed to convince a judge that information about its software in court filings that's already available on the Internet and in print is "trade secrets" that should remain sealed from public view.

Apple, the maker of the iPad and iPhone, had asked U.S. District Judge William Alsup in San Francisco to seal documents containing information about its Mac OS X operating system and computer products, including Apple's technological protection measure, system integrity checks and thermal management techniques, according to court documents.

The Cupertino, California-based company didn't deny that the information was already public or argue that it was misappropriated, Alsup said in his ruling today. Apple maintained that because it wasn't the source of the information and had never confirmed it, trade secret protection still exists, Alsup said.

"Apple cannot have this court seal information merely to avoid confirmation that the publicly available sources got it right," Alsup said.

Information about the operating system is available on the website of a book about the software, the judge said. Apple's decryption key haiku is available to any user who compiles and runs publicly available code on a MacBook Air laptop, he said.

The ruling came in Apple's copyright-infringement lawsuit against Psystar Corp., a maker of Macintosh computer clones that was barred in 2009 by Alsup from selling copies of Apple's operating system or products that circumvent technologies that control access to the software. His order covered a Psystar software product that allowed customers to run the Mac operating systems on non-Apple computers. The companies reached a $2.67 million partial settlement of the lawsuit in 2009.

A federal appeals court in San Francisco'upheld Alsup's sales injunction in September and ordered some documents in the case unsealed. Apple renewed its sealing request, telling Alsup that the information could be used to facilitate the same type of infringement that Psystar had done, according to court filings. Alsup ordered that unredacted versions of documents should be unsealed.

Kristin Huguet, a spokeswoman for Apple, didn't immediately respond to a voice-mail message seeking comment on the ruling. Kiwi Camara, an attorney for Psystar, didn't immediately respond to an e-mail seeking

comment.

Yahoo Picks PayPal's Pocket To Hire Latest CEO

Yahoo's previous turnaround attempts have flopped under three different leaders with dramatically different backgrounds - former movie mogul Terry Semel, beloved Yahoo co-founder Jerry Yang and profanity-spewing Silicon Valley veteran Carol Bartz.

Now, the struggling Internet company is making yet another unorthodox choice with Wednesday's announcement that it has lured Scott Thompson away from a lower-profile job running eBay's thriving PayPal service to step into the pressure-packed position as Yahoo's fourth CEO in less than five years.

The appointment raised questions among analysts, since Thompson, 54, has no experience in online content and advertising, Yahoo's chief sources of revenue. The timing of Thompson's hiring also came as a surprise, given that Yahoo's board has been considering a sale of all or part of the company since firing Bartz four months ago.

With Thompson's selection, Yahoo's board is signaling that it believes the company can still rebound, despite several years of losing ground to Google and Facebook in product innovation and online advertising.

Even so, a sale of Yahoo's most prized assets - its investments in Yahoo Japan and China's Alibaba Group - is likely. Softbank Corp., Yahoo Japan's largest shareholder, and Alibaba Group have proposed buying back most of Yahoo's holdings in the Asian companies in a deal valued at $17 billion, according to published reports.

Yahoo Chairman Roy Bostock dismissed recent speculation that Yahoo might team up with buyout firms to take the company private.

"It has not been on our radar screen," he said Wednesday. "I think it's a moot issue from my point of view."

Thompson's job will be to revive Yahoo's revenue growth and repair the company's fractured relationship with investors fed up with a litany of broken turnaround promises.

Yahoo's stock hasn't traded above $20 in more than three years. On Wednesday, it dropped 51 cents, or 3 percent, to close at $15.78. Those are difficult numbers for stockholders to stomach, given that Microsoft Corp. offered to buy Yahoo in its entirety for $33 per share, or $47.5 billion, in May 2008.

"There is no shareholder or investor who will be less patient than me," Thompson, a Boston native who still has his hometown accent 18 years after moving to California, said in an interview. "We have got to be able to grow this business. There is no question that is priority No. 1."

Thompson's predecessors embraced a similar agenda with mostly dismal results.

Analysts estimate Yahoo's revenue last year totaled about $5 billion, down from nearly $7 billion in 2007. During the same span, Google's revenue

soared from $17 billion to an estimated $38 billion. Privately held Facebook doesn't disclose its finances.

Thanks largely to cost-cutting measures imposed by Bartz, Yahoo has become more profitable. Last year, it earned an estimated $1.1 billion, up from $660 million in 2007.

Still, investors are disappointed with the downturn in revenue at a time when advertisers are spending more money on the Internet.

Yahoo was attracted by Thompson's impressive track record at PayPal, where he was chief technology officer for three years before becoming the online payment service's top executive in 2008. PayPal's annual revenue more than doubled from $1.9 billion when Thompson took over the division to an estimated $4.4 billion last year.

In a conference call, Thompson said it is too early to offer details on how he intends to revive Yahoo's revenue growth. But he indicated that one of the keys to success will be Yahoo's ability to decipher the information that it gathers on the preferences of its 700 million users so it can help advertisers target their commercial pitches.

"Diving into the data, we are going to find ways to compete and innovate in ways the world hasn't seen yet," he said.

Thompson also will have to lift Yahoo's employee morale, which has deteriorated along with the company's fortunes.

His departure from PayPal threatens to hurt eBay Inc., where the payments service has emerged as the fastest-growing part of a company best known for running online auctions.

EBay CEO John Donahoe said in a companywide email Wednesday: "There is one thing I am certain of: PayPal has an enormous opportunity in front of it, and we will not slow down. We will not miss a beat."

Investors weren't as confident. EBay stock fell $1.18, or nearly 4 percent, to close at $30.16.

Thompson received a compensation package valued at $10.4 million, including a $645,000 salary, from eBay in 2010, according to regulatory documents. Yahoo did not disclose how much it offered to lure him away.

Those figures are likely to emerge in a regulatory filing in the next few days.

Yahoo awarded Bartz a compensation package valued at $47.2 million during her first year on the job in 2009. The pay, which included a $1 million salary, consisted most of stock incentives that didn't become as valuable as Yahoo projected because the company's stock remained in a funk during Bartz's tenure.

PayPal Tests In-store Payment System at Home Depot

EBay's PayPal service is testing out a payments system in brick-and-mortar Home Depot stores.

PayPal spokesman Anuj Nayar said Friday that the system is being tested in just five stores and involves a small number of PayPal employees. That means it's not available to the general public and likely won't be for some time.

The move is part of eBay's strategy to expand beyond the desktop computer into mobile devices and other aspects of everyday life.

EBay CEO John Donahoe had mentioned the plans in October during the company's earnings conference call. But he did not say which retailer was participating.

To pay using PayPal, customers will be able to enter their phone number and a pin code, or use a special PayPal card.

Sick of PayPal? Check Out These Alternatives

PayPal has long been a tent pole of e-commerce, a service integrated into nearly every online shopping experience. But that doesn t mean it s above the ire of the Internet. Lately something s been amiss over at the site, and now complaints of shoddy customer service and poorly worded user policies are coming back to haunt it.

First, in true holiday spirit, PayPal froze Regretsy s charity campaign and a company representative dealt with the situation poorly (the phrase "You can use the donate button to raise money for a sick cat, but not poor people" comes to mind). And this isn t the first time PayPal has been accused of abusing its power: various websites have had their donate button access revoked at the site s whim, and in many cases, the forced refunds directly profited PayPal. Even if that is totally above board, it isn t a practice that will endear itself to most.

Now, Regretsy is feeling that pain again, but this time as a spectator after a woman shared her story with the website. Recently, a woman named Erica sold a rare violin for $2500, and used PayPal for the transfer of funds. The buyer wasn t satisfied, saying it may be a fraud despite legitimate authentication, and he wanted a refund which Erica was willing to grant. PayPal then decided with very little evidence that the violin was counterfeit, and stated that in order to issue a refund the buyer would need to destroy the antique violin, leaving Erica without the sale money, and without the antique violin.

Once again, we could be looking at a PayPal fail. And if you re one of the many who s had enough, it s time to start doing your shopping elsewhere. Google Checkout

Pros: It s never a bad idea to get on board with Google if you re searching for Web apps. If you have even one or two other Google accounts, the incentive becomes even greater. Small business owners might already be using Google Ads or Offers (and think of the capabilities if Google Wallet really takes off), and there s something to be said for simplicity. Comparatively low cost as well.

Cons: This is a relatively new Google product and it s not quite ready for widespread consumer use yet. You can only use debit and credit cards, and as with all of these other options, it s not as widely used as PayPal.

Cost: Using this to process sales will cost a minimum of 1.9-percent + $0.30 per transaction. Transaction processing rates you are charged are determined by your sales volume from the month prior (extra 1-percent if you re selling to someone in a different country).
Amazon Payments

Pros: If you re a real e-commerce addict, you probably use Amazon often enough as is. And if you re constantly selling items on Amazon, there s an immediate upside right there. Of course Amazon s prestige in the market is also a benefit.

Cons: You can t simply install an Amazon Payment button on your site and keep users on your page, they will instead be redirected to Amazon. Amazon has been criticized for its server structure in the past, and it might come back to haunt you (not to mention you re helping promote that brand instead of your own).

Cost: Transactions greater than $10, Amazon charges 2.9-percent + $0.30. Less than $10, 5-percent and $0.05.
Dwolla

Pros: Dwolla is super user friendly and ties in to the growing social commerce movement. You can send money through syncing with social networks and pay for things with your phone. Dwolla will also immediately pay for something up front that costs up to $500, as long you pay that back within a month.

Cons: In order to use its faster deposit system "Instant," you have to pay $3 a month. Otherwise it s a three to five day wait to get and send funds. It s also a new company, which means it s still developing the application s architecture and working out the kinks.

Cost: Transactions under $10 are free; over $10 they are $0.25.

Acer Iconia Tab A200 Android Tablet Debuts at $329

Computer maker Acer is upping its Android tablet game, today announcing its new Acer Iconia A200 Android tablet. The Iconia A200 builds on the 7-inch Iconia A100, jumping out to a 10.1-inch 1280 by 800-pixel touchscreen display and keeping the 1 GHz dual-core Nvidia Tegra processor and 1 GB of memory. And while the Iconia A200 will launch this month with Android 3.2 Honeycomb, Acer says it ll be upgradable to Android 4.0 Ice Cream Sandwich next month.

"The Acer Iconia Tab family of tablets is an excellent example of Acer s ability to deliver high-performance, full-function mobile devices at unbeatable values," said Acer America senior product manager Eric Ackerson, in a statement. "Acer brings the Iconia Tab A200 to consumers at an affordable price, without making sacrifices on key tablet features such as expansion, connectivity to other devices, HD displays and cameras."

The Iconia A200 comes with either 8 or 16 GB of onboard flash storage and a microSD slot that can handle up to 32 GB more. The table features a 2 megapixel front-facing camera for video chat, 802.11b/g/n Wi-Fi for connecting to the Internet or media servers around the house (via Acer a DLNA-compliant clear.fi technology), and Acer says the tablet sports both a full-size and microUSB port for connecting with other devices. Although

Acer is keep to position the A200 as a gaming and entertainment tablet - supporting 1080p HD video, HD gaming (thanks to the Tegra-powered graphics), and of course Adobe Flash-based games - that doesn t mean it fizzles out after a bit of use - Acer says the A200 can run for up to eight hours on a single battery charge.

Acer has also bundled its own software into the A200, including the Acer Ring interface (enabling quick access to items using a double circle located on the system bar), along with Acer s SocialJogger that combines Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking services into a single portal. Acer s also pre-loaded Amazon s Kindle app for ereading fans.

The Acer Iconia Tab will be available in 8 GB and 16 GB configurations starting January 15, with the 8 GB edition starting at $329.00 and the 16 GB version carrying a $349.99 suggested price - and Acer says Android 4.0 Cream Sandwich will be available for the tablet in mid-February.

Computer Accessory Lets You Navigate Windows 8 with Your Eyes

Here's something that could make Windows 8 a lot more fun to use - a system that gives you the power to navigate the computer with your eyes. Microsoft's newest operating system isn't commercially available yet, but Swedish company Tobii has long prepared for its arrival by tweaking its Gaze eye-tracking technology to work with the Windows 8 interface.

Gaze works by attaching an eye monitoring device that follows the movement of your eyes to the computer's USB port. An onscreen indicator appears on the part of the screen you're looking at, and all you need to do is click the trackpad to launch a program or click a link.

The Windows 8 OS is designed not only for computers but also for tablets and smartphones. One of its defining features is the Start Screen, which you can customize with application tiles and other widgets. Tobii claims that while the interface works well on a tablet with a touchscreen display, it doesn't feel natural scrolling through all the tiles on a computer screen using a trackpad.

The Gaze technology has previously been used for various medical applications, as well as to make the world's first eye-controlled arcade game. Tobii will demonstrate Gaze for Windows 8 at the Consumer Electronics Show that will take place on January 10 to 13.

Microsoft Celebrates The Slow Death of IE6

It s not often that a company celebrates the demise of one of its (former) flagship products, but Microsoft is happily shouting "good riddance" to its aging Internet Explorer 6 browser.

"Time to pop open the champagne because, based on the latest data from Net Applications, IE6 usage in the US has now officially dropped below 1%!," announced the company gleefully in a January 3 post on the Windows Team Blog. "IE6 has been the punch line of browser jokes for a while, and we ve been as eager as anyone to see it go away."

Internet Explorer 6 (IE6) was launched in 2001. Despite its age, less-than-savvy web users continued to use the browser - most often because it came bundled with Microsoft s Windows XP software and users were reluctant to upgrade their software or browser.

Frustrated web developers have long complained that IE6 is hindering the progress of the web at large because of of its incompatibility with modern web technologies.

However, over the last couple of years, major internet properties such as Facebook and YouTube have phased out support for the browser and prompted users to upgrade to a more modern alternative such as Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari, Opera or recent versions of IE including IE8 and IE9.

According to Microsoft's Internet Explorer 6 Countdown site, 7.7 percent of internet users globally were using IE6 in December 2011, down 6 percentage points from the year before.

While IE6 usage in the US has dropped to 0.9 percent, more than a quarter (25.2 percent) of people in the China were still using the antiquated browser in December 2011. IE6 usage in South Korea, Japan, Vietnam and India was also high at 7.2 percent, 5.9 percent, 5.5 percent and 5.4 percent respectively.

The 'CES Curse?' Gadget Show Has Poor Record

The largest trade show in the Americas must be a great place to show off new products, right? Wrong. The International Consumer Electronics Show is quickly becoming a launch pad for products that fall flat.

When the annual conclave kicks off next week, organizers expect more than 140,000 people - roughly the population of Syracuse, N.Y. - to descend on Las Vegas. They will mill around 1.8 million square feet of booths and exhibits, equivalent to 31 football fields.

The 2,800 or so exhibitors are hoping to set the tone for the year by showing off tons of tablet computers, throngs of 3-D TVs and untold numbers of slim, light laptops called ultrabooks.

But a look back at the products heavily promoted at CES in recent years reveals few successes.

* In 2009, "netbooks" - tiny, cheap laptops - were a hot category at the show. They did have a good year, but interest was already waning when Apple Inc. obliterated the category with the launch of the iPad in 2010.

Another big, eagerly awaited launch at the 2009 CES was Palm Inc.'s webOS software, running on a new generation of smartphones. Those devices debuted later that year to good reviews and dismal sales. A year later, Palm was sold to Hewlett-Packard Co., which killed the product line in 2011.

* In 2010, TV makers made a big push with 3-D sets, hoping to ride the popularity of 3-D movies such as "Avatar." Sales turned out to be disappointing as buyers balked at wearing glasses and found little to watch in 3-D. The technology isn't going away, but 3-D looks to be just another feature among many of today's high-end TVs.

Other manufacturers at that show hoped to ride the success of Amazon.com Inc.'s Kindle with their own e-readers. They failed, though Barnes & Noble Inc. made some inroads later in the year with its Nook. That rivalry played out away from CES.

* In 2011, there were more than 100 brands of tablet computers on display, all trying to ride the coattails of the iPad. Many of them didn't even make it to the market; those that did couldn't make a dent in Apple's market share.

Amazon's Kindle Fire tablet did start to crack Apple's hegemony late in the year, but it wasn't shown at CES.

Verizon Wireless got attention at the 2011 show with the first consumer devices to use its ultra-fast "4G LTE" data network. Although those did well over the year, the company upstaged itself by announcing, a week after the show, that it would start selling the iPhone.

A big part of the "curse" of the show is that the company that has been driving trends in the industry, Apple, doesn't show products there. It doesn't have a booth, and its executives don't give speeches. It hasn't had an official presence at all since the 90s, though some of its employees go.

It's not that Apple dislikes CES in particular. It just doesn't do trade shows. When it has something new to sell, it puts on its own press conference. That way, it can control everything.

Microsoft Corp. seems to be adopting the same strategy. It revealed last month that the 2012 show will be the last one that its CEO will kick off with a keynote speech. That ends a run of 15 straight years. It's also the last time Microsoft has a booth at the show.

The problem with the show's timing will be acute for Microsoft this year. A new version of Windows won't be ready until the fall. In his keynote speech Monday evening, CEO Steve Ballmer can, at best, show very raw prototypes of the products that will run Windows 8.

What's left in the show booths are companies that don't quite have the clout or money to draw people to its own events, plus ones that put out new products at a reliable annual pace, such as TV and car makers.

The president of the Consumer Electronics Association, Gary Shapiro, says he isn't worried.

After all, attendance is up. The show is set for its third year of growth from the recession-stripped nadir of 2009 and could touch the record numbers hit in 2006.

That matters because the attendees are all industry people. Consumers aren't allowed in. Having everyone who matters in Vegas for a couple of days in the year makes it easy to set up face-to-face meetings that would take weeks to organize otherwise. In that context, it matters less that the show hasn't been a great staging ground for new products.

"I'm pretty comfortable that we're the most important event for technology in the world," Shapiro said. "It's difficult to come out with someone really important who's not there."

Apple CEO Tim Cook's absence may make him the exception. His predecessor, Steve Jobs, was certainly never caught loitering on the show floor. But the company contingent will probably be strong. Last year, the Apple's retail store division alone sent 159 people, according to the CEA.

So what potential flops will be hyped at the show this year?

* Windows 8 will be an important new product in 2012, but the late-year launch means PC and tablet makers hoping for a CES boost have to wait.

The new operating system is built for touch screens, the kind made popular by iPhones and iPads. Windows 8 will also run on cellphone-style processing chips, the type used in most tablets. That should improve battery life considerably over the PC-type chips that Windows runs on today. However, many analysts believe Microsoft has already lost this market to Apple.

* As a stopgap, PC makers will show off ultrabooks. They're essentially Windows versions of the MacBook Air laptop, which uses chips instead of a spinning hard drive for storage. That makes the machines lighter and thinner but also more expensive. Expectations for ultrabooks are modest – Gary Balter at Credit Suisse believes they could make up 10 percent of laptops sales this year.

* Having failed to catch the iPad wave last year with $500 tablets, some tablet makers will try to catch the Kindle Fire wave with smaller, cheaper tablets. But the profit margins are tiny at that price, so bigger Asian manufacturers are setting their sights on the tablet version of Windows 8, hoping it will provide them better opportunities, said Rhoda Alexander, an analyst at IHS iSuppli.

* TV makers will be talking about "smart," Internet-connected sets, but they're not exactly new.

However, we'll see the first full-size TVs that use organic light-emitting diodes in place of LCDs. LG Electronics has confirmed that it will be showing off a 55-inch set, to be sold late in the year. The price hasn't been disclosed, but is likely to be high. OLED sets can be painfully thin – in LG's case, less than a third of an inch – and should boast improved image quality as well.

We'll also see TVs that are "smart" in the sense that they respond to gestures or spoken commands. However, until cable set-top boxes get smart, too, we won't be able to abandon remotes.

Paul Gagnon, an analyst at DisplaySearch, said TV manufacturers are trying to get ahead of Apple. He and other analysts believe the company is working on a TV set that could be introduced this year. Some speculate that "Siri," the voice-control application in the latest iPhone, is a dry run for a voice-controlled TV.

Apple hasn't commented on the speculation. It has agreements with Hollywood studios for sales and rentals of movies through iTunes, but to create a TV that's unmistakably "Apple," it would likely require broader agreements with content providers, such as rights to stream live TV. Even Apple might not be able to challenge the content industry's way of business.

"They've been able to break down those digital barriers with music and other applications, but TV is going to be one of the tougher areas," Gagnon said.

In other words, an Apple TV could be an expensive flop. Staying away from
CES is no guarantee for success.

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